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AUTHOR El-Koumy, Abdel Salam A.
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ABSTRACT

This study tested the effectiveness of the cloze procedure, used aurally, to teach listening comprehension in English as a foreign language (EFL). Subjects were the classes of two teachers (n=74, n=75); one teacher taught using the aural cloze procedure, and the other taught using conventional listening instruction techniques. In aural cloze instruction, the teacher would read the cloze text aloud; at the end of sentence, students worked cooperatively in small groups to supply the deleted words and participate in teacher-led discussions about the various possible answers. In conventional instruction, students were read the entire text aloud, then answered questions orally or in writing, matched sentences with pictures, or drew or completed a map or picture. Comparison of pre- and posttest results for both groups reveals that the aural cloze treatment group performed better than the conventional treatment group after instruction. The pretest/posttest is appended. Contains 36 references. (MSE)

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Effect of Cloze Instruction on EFL Listening Comprehension

ABDEL SALAM A. EL-KOUMY

Suez Canal University, Egypt

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Introduction

Over the last two decades attention has been directed towards the feasibility of using the cloze procedure as a teaching technique for developing comprehension skills. A plethora of articles have appeared extolling the instructional virtues of this technique. In an article entitled "Using the cloze procedure as a teaching technique," Radice (1978: 201-203) summarizes the advantages of this procedure as follows: 1) ease of preparation, 2) ease of administration, 3) immediate knowledge of results, 4) feedback to the teacher, 5) suitability for group correction, 6) flexibility, and 7) separation of grammatical difficulties. Theoretical support for the cloze procedure as a teaching technique also comes from Richardson (cited in Bastidas 1989: 91) who states that:

> The cloze procedure provides both the teacher and the pupil with a new and stimulating way to acquire and apply skills. The myriad uses of the cloze procedure coupled with the simplicity of construction makes it a very useful tool for each classroom.

Gefen (1979: 123) gives farther support for the cloze procedure as a teaching technique. He writes:

> ... a cloze passage is far more than a complex completion exercise: it is an aspect of controlled composition (oral or written) and demands of the learner a more creative approach to language learning and language use as well as an involvement with the passage as a whole....

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Supporting Gefen's view, Lev and Miluse Soudek (1983: 336-337) state that:

> Whether used in language testing or as a versatile exercise in a variety of teaching situations, the cloze procedure aims at a multitude of abilities (see, e. g. Brown 1980: 214) that constitute the learner's communicative competence in a second language. It

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addresses the lexical, semantic, and syntactic inter-relationships which characterize the unique structure of a language. In this respect it reflects both the Gestalt concept of wholeness and the view of language as a system comprising integrated subsystems, as espoused particularly by Prague school of structuralists.

A final advantage, noted by Seifeddin (1988: 235), is that the cloze procedure as a teaching technique helps teachers to diagnose and overcome the difficulties learners encounter.

Despite the many advantages of the cloze procedure as a teaching technique, some ELT specialists have a bias against using this technique in language teaching in general. One reason for the bias against this technique is that it is difficult to process even if it is easy to create (Gillingham and Garner 1992: 235). Another reason is that it does not rely directly on higher levels of text comprehension such as intersentence and paragraph comprehension (loc. cit.).

In summary, the controversy among language teaching theorists, regarding the effectiveness of the cloze procedure as a teaching technique, makes research urgently needed in this area to prove or disprove existing theories.

Review of empirical literature

Previous literature has mainly focused on using the cloze procedure for teaching reading comprehension (e. g., Binkly 1975, Cox 1974, Culhane 1973, Faubion 1972, Guscott 1972, Paradis and Bayne 1977, Pepin 1974, Rhodes 1973, Whitmer 1975, Yellin 1978). However, only two studies involved the use of the cloze procedure as a teaching technique in the area of listening (Hasson 1981, Kennedy and Weener 1973). Hasson (1981) investigated the effectiveness of aural cloze as an instructional technique in improving kindergarten children's vocabulary and listening comprehension. The aural cloze instruction used in her study involved reading stories aloud to children and having them supply words deleted from

the story. The study was designed with a control group which did not receive instruction in aural cloze. The results revealed no significant differences in vocabulary or listening comprehension between students who received aural cloze instruction and those who did not. Kennedy and Weener (1973) investigated the effects of visual and auditory cloze training on listening and reading comprehension. One experimental group received training in visual cloze and the other experimental group received training in auditory cloze. The findings indicated that both the experimental groups performed significantly higher ($p<0.05$) than the two control groups on both written and aural cloze posttests.

From the review of the empirical literature, it is clear that: 1) very little research has been conducted relating cloze and listening comprehension, 2) there is conflicting evidence on the usefulness of cloze as a teaching technique for enhancing listening comprehension, and 3) no studies have been found that involved the use of aural cloze as a teaching technique with ESL/EFL students.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to determine the effect of aural cloze instruction on the listening comprehension of EFL students.

Research variables

The **independent** variables in this study were: 1) aural cloze instruction, 2) regular listening instruction. In aural cloze instruction, the teacher read the cloze text aloud. During reading he said the word 'blank' at each deletion. At the end of each sentence, students worked cooperatively in small groups to supply the deleted word and then participated in teacher-led discussions. These discussions focused upon the various answers that could be used in a cloze blank and upon the reasons for a particular answer being correct or incorrect within the sentence. In regular listening instruction, students were read the text. They were then

asked to show their comprehension in one of the following ways: 1) answering questions orally or in writing, 2) matching sentences with pictures, 3) drawing or completing a map or picture.

The **dependent** variable was EFL students' listening comprehension.

Research hypotheses

The hypotheses of concern in this study were stated as follows:

1. There would be no statistically significant difference in the mean scores on the pretest between the experimental group and the control group.
2. There would be no statistically significant difference in the mean scores on the posttest between the group which received aural cloze instruction and the group that remained in the regular classroom.

Teaching materials

The seventeen listening texts, which appear in the teacher's manual *Welcome to English, Teacher's Book 3* together with the listening exercises in *Welcome to English Workbook 3*, were used with the control group. The same texts were modified into instructional cloze materials and used with the experimental group. The lexical or rational cloze deletion method was used in developing the aural cloze materials. In this method, the deletions (one per sentence) were made only for meaning-bearing words such as nouns, verbs, and adjectives as used by Hasson (1973), Kennedy and Weener (1973). This deletion method, as Jongsma (1980: 17) sees it, appears to be "more effective instructionally than semi-random deletion systems such as every-nth word or every-nth noun-verb."

Instrument

To verify the hypotheses of the study, a listening comprehension test was constructed to be used as a pre- and post-test. This test comprised four sections (five items in each). All test items were entirely independent of the speaking, reading and writing skills so that the testees could score up to their own

listening abilities (see Appendix A). Prior to using the test in the study, its content validity was established by the process of expert judgment. Seven inspectors and 3 university teachers reviewed the test items for relevance. Furthermore, the test reliability was assessed by administering the test to a pilot group (n= 37) and calculating the coefficient alpha for each set of items. The coefficient alpha for the first section was 0.81, for the second section was 0.88, for the third section was 0.78, and for the fourth section was 0.86. These coefficient alphas indicated that the overall instrument was internally consistent.

Procedure

Before the start of the study, the two participating teachers were randomly assigned to the treatment conditions by flipping a coin. After that each teacher went through a training session, lasting for three hours, in the use of the method to which he was assigned. At the beginning of the study, all subjects were pretested. The pretest data were then analyzed by using the t-test. Following pretesting, each teacher taught the seventeen listening texts to his classes over a period of six months from October 1994 until March 1995. The two teachers taught from detailed lesson plans that were developed by the researcher to ensure that the same listening texts would be taught through using the two methods of the study. Additionally, both teachers followed the textbook writer's procedures in teaching the other skills (speaking, reading and writing). Throughout the duration of the study, the researcher continued to visit the participating teachers for in-class follow-up and coaching. At the end of the study, all subjects were posttested. Then the subjects' responses to the posttest were scored without knowledge of group affiliation. Finally, the posttest scores were analyzed using the t-test for independent measures.

Findings and discussion

Pretest results

Table 1

The difference in the mean scores between the experimental group and the control group on the pretest

Group	N	M	S.D.	t-value
Experimental	74	3.47	1.34	1.03
Control	75	3.27	1.10	

As shown in Table 1, the t-test for the pretest data revealed no significant differences in the mean scores between the experimental group and the control group (t=1.03, p= n. s.). Therefore, the first null hypothesis was accepted. This result may be attributed to the fact that all subjects studied the same textbooks for the same amount of time. This suggests that the two groups of the study were fairly equivalent in their listening comprehension at the beginning of the study.

Posttest results

Table 2

The difference in the mean scores between the experimental group and the control group on the posttest

Group	N	M	S. D.	t-value
Experimental	74	12.28	2.58	7.01
Control	75	9.36	2.51	

As shown in Table 2, the average mean score for the group exposed to aural cloze instruction was 12.28 (S. D.= 2.58) and for the group exposed to regular instruction was 9.36 (S. D.= 2.51). The difference between the two means was 2.92. The obtained t-value for this difference was 7.01 which was statistically significant at the 0.05 level of confidence. Therefore, the second null hypothesis was rejected. There are five possible explanations for this finding: 1) aural cloze instruction might provide students with confidence in guessing the meaning of unknown words from the context before panicking or giving up in despair. 2) the discussion accompanying the cloze practices might help the students learn new concepts and new labels for these concepts. 3) aural cloze instruction might increase the facility of understanding how various words in a sentence fit together to make sense. 4) aural cloze instruction might require more participation on the part of the learner than regular instruction, and 5) students might enjoy aural cloze instruction more than regular instruction.

Directions for future research

The following directions for future research are suggested by the study:

1. Exploring the effect of random versus selective deletions on EFL listening comprehension.
2. Exploring the effect of cloze instruction with and without discussion on EFL listening comprehension.
3. Exploring the effect of lexical versus syntactic deletions on EFL listening comprehension.
4. Exploring the effect of aural cloze instruction for different listening levels.
5. Exploring the effect of word versus sentence deletions on EFL listening comprehension.

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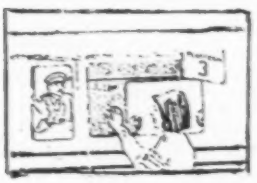
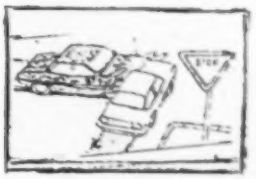
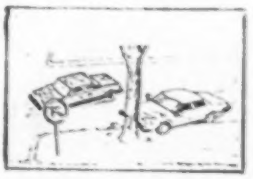
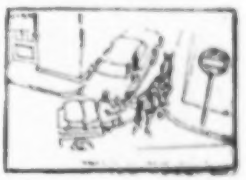
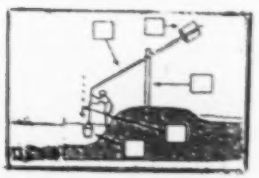
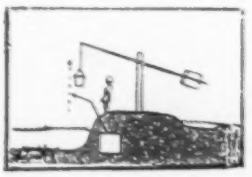
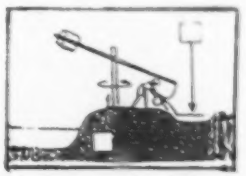
Appendix A

The Listening Comprehension Test

I. **Directions**: You will hear a statement for each set of pictures. Each statement will be spoken just one time. When you hear a statement, look at the three pictures and decide which one is correct. Then, on your answer sheet, find the number of the statement and mark your answer in the appropriate place. There will be a two-minute pause after each statement for reply.

* The testees receive the following sets of pictures:

	A	B	C
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			

* The testees hear:

1. She is typing.

2. She is saying goodbye to her husband.

3. The puppet is tied to the tree.

4. The car crashed into the tree.

5. The farmer is pulling down the bucket.

II **Directions**: You will hear five statements about this picture but some are correct and others are incorrect. At the end of each statement mark "T" for true and "F" for false on your answer sheet. Each statement will be spoken just one time. There will be a two-minute pause after each statement for reply.

* The testees receive this picture:

* The testees hear:

1. The cow is turning the water wheel.

2. The boy climbed the tree.

3. Someone is lying under the tree.

4. Some birds are flying in the sky.

5. The man is driving a tractor.

III. **Directions**: You will hear a narrative text. At the end of this text, you will be asked five questions about what was said. After each question, you will hear three answers. On your answer sheet, find the number of the question and mark your answer in the appropriate place. There will be a two-minute pause after each question for reply.

* The testees hear:[1]

My cóusin, Jóhn is a univérsity stúdent .// Lást yéar/he wént to Ítaly/and stáyed thére for two mónths.//I was surprised that Jóhn was áble to háve/such a lóng hóliday/becáuse he néver has ány móney.//

'Hów did you mánage it, Jóhn?'/I ásked.// 'I thóught you were góing to stáy for two wéeks.'//

'It was éasy,'/ Jóhn ánswered.// 'I gót a jób. '//

'A jób !'/ I excláimed .// 'Whát did you dó?'//

'I gáve Énglish léssons to a grócer,'/John ánswered.// 'His náme is Luigi.//We have becóme gréat friends.'//

'But you're nót a téacher,' /I sáid.//

'I tóld Luigi I cóuldn't téach.'/ Jóhn explâined.// 'But he insisted on háving conversâtion léssons.//He wánted to práctise his Énglish.//He has a lót of Américan cústomers,/so it is impórtant for him to spéak Énglish.// I spént thrée hóurs a dáy tálking to him.//In réturn / he gáve me a róom and a little pócket móney.'//

'Did your púpil léarn múch Énglish?'/I ásked.//

'I dón't knów,'/ Jóhn said,/'but I léarnt a lót of Itálian!'//

---

1 Adapted from Alexander 1977

* Choose the right answer

(1) Why did John go to Italy?

(a) to get a job (b) to have a holiday (c) to learn Italian

(2) How long did John stay in Itally?

(a) for a year (b) for two weeks (c) for two months

(3) Why did Luigi want to practise his English?

(a) because he has a lot of American friends

(b) because he has a lot of money

(c) because he has a lot of American customers

(4) What is Luigi?

(a) a teacher (b) a grocer (c) a butcher

(5) What did John get in return for the lessons he gave?

(a) a room (b) a little pocket money (c) both

IV. **Directions**: You will hear five statements but some are true and others are false. At the end of each statement, mark "T" for true and "F" for false on your answer sheet. Each statement will be spoken just one time. There will be a two-minute pause after each statement for reply.

1. Carpets are made of glass.

2. Bread is made by bakers.

3. A carpenter is a person who makes furniture from wood.

4. Plants can grow without water.

5. Before electric lights were invented, people used to light houses with oil.

Appendix B

Answer Sheet

Name:

School: **Class:**

I	1	A	B	C
	2	A	B	C
	3	A	B	C
	4	A	B	C
	5	A	B	C
II	1	T	F	
	2	T	F	
	3	T	F	
	4	T	F	
	5	T	F	
III	1	A	B	C
	2	A	B	C
	3	A	B	C
	4	A	B	C
	5	A	B	C
IV	1	T	F	
	2	T	F	
	3	T	F	
	4	T	F	
	5	T	F	